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## THE ADOLESCENT AND THE SCHOOLS

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To judge from the space in the newspapers and magazines given to the discussion of educational problems, one would say that education was fairly under way toward a revolution. And educational reform is not limited to discussion; new methods of teaching have been developed. Clever teachers have originated excellent devices for keeping the interest of the adolescent in their subjects—as, for instance, in order to chocolate-coat the bitter pellet of his Latin grammar the Latin student may play that he is in a Latin school or he may impersonate a Roman judge and preside over a Roman court. Original methods have made the young people take no little zest in their studies. Some years ago when the natural sciences were introduced into the schools and the handwork of our grandparents revived, the revolution seemed to be an actual fact. The worth of the natural sciences is not to be doubted, and after all there is no adequate reason why they should not be taught to some extent in the grades, as Mr. Wiley has successfully done in the Gary schools. But the industrial studies too must share in the universal skepticism concerning education. They furnish no ready-made way to intellectual growth any more than do the classical or disciplinary subjects. The handicrafts with their modicum of intellectual effort do give a practical value to school work, and the more practical they become the more secure will be their hold upon the curriculum.

Because of the introduction of the vocational subjects education has appeared to the popular mind to have become socialized. Yet the “socialization of education” which we hear so much discussed is rather an ideal in the minds of educators than a reality of school life. What subjects are taught in the high school which would give the adolescent an idea of the society in which he lives or of himself as a social being? The war has taught us forcibly that we are

social beings, and yet it has also shown us that we know little of ourselves as members of the social group. It has convinced us of our failure as individual competitors. But there are studies today which bring new thought to men as the Latin and Greek classics at one period brought a new birth to men. Surely, besides the sciences, psychology, sociology, and economics have been the humanities to H. G. Wells, Galsworthy, and Shaw.

In reviewing my high-school course and my college studies and in comparing the one with the other, it seems to me that, although my high-school work was pleasant enough, after a short time at college I suddenly began to grow mentally. The difference in age may have some relation to this experience, but I think maturity was not wholly responsible. The new studies which college offered began to clear away some of the mysteries, and I felt as if I were emerging from a murky undergrowth into sunlight. Since that time I have wondered why the favorite subjects of college students—psychology, sociology, economics—could not in some degree be taught to high-school students.

A child of sixteen is at the age when if he is not intellectually satisfied he is very apt to become intellectually blasé. Nor is he satisfied to know only of the past; he is wild to know about himself and his own world. One might give the lack of suitable textbooks as a reason that these subjects of human interest have not as yet been introduced into the high school. In the first place the professional thinkers, interested in college work, have not made any study as to what to include in a high-school text. Men usually forget their adolescent days, their adolescent state of mind, and point of view. But again, the professors have had no demand made upon them to write such textbooks. The school men of secondary education, too, unlike the business men who demand wares from every market, have found convenient textbooks in Latin and algebra, and, satisfied with these, have submitted the child to his struggle for an intellectual existence. That few have survived many are now beginning to realize. Most of the people remain ignorant both of the laws governing their own lives, and of their institutions unless, indeed, they are acute enough to theorize from experience. Thrust suddenly from high-school life into the established order of things, the young person does not know that this régime is not in the least

sacred, but has come through a long period of growth and change and undergone costly convulsions. Would "things as they are" be manipulated with such difficulty if the adolescent, at the age when emotions are vigorous and wholesome and the intellect active, learned a little of instinct, of habit, of institutions, or of trade and labor? I do not propose to say what should be included in the new textbooks—those far wiser than I can do that—but I do believe that some of the favorite college subjects can be taught the high-school student, and that the college professor will still have something to give the upper tenth.

Have you ever been thoroughly disgusted with life because your heartless grown-ups chose to spell in your presence some interesting information before you had learned the combination? If you have had that experience you can appreciate the case of the eager-minded adolescent at the present time. In spite of the infantile attitude—an attitude comprised of both helplessness and greed—which most men take toward public affairs, students are finding an unusually large market for their theories of the human and his work. The world at least has discovered that men must know more of themselves and have better control of their actions individually and collectively. The adolescent may hear hints of these discussions in the home, the street, the newspaper or magazine, but he has no particular interest in learning of world events and theories in interpretation of them because he does not understand the terms. Many boys spend their hours out of school in some such business as the selling of papers. Here they notice, or rather react, to the laws of demand and supply and competition, but they are hardly conscious of the fact that there are laws. The boy in business learns unconsciously the law of trade "to grab before the next fellow has a chance." Were it possible that he might learn that this competition is the survival of the struggle for existence, and that co-operation is something to be looked forward to in trade, perhaps the high-school boy when he becomes an employer might appreciate his employees in a new way. Boys or girls may have heard of settlement houses and of other agencies of social service; perhaps they have heard too of the church, and they may have caught the word that the church is going to pieces. Though the adolescent may seemingly be very indifferent to religion, yet I know that the

facts of this universal experience, honestly presented, are very interesting to him. The world is filled with great ideas now as never before. The newspapers even, as I have said, may catch them. Yet when the young person turns to a newspaper he reads the "scare" columns and the "funny" page. His intellect is called upon to consider the problems of Latin grammar and mathematics. His own live interest then wanders to love stories, sports, vaudeville, and movies. He is not taught the real humanities, barring literature and history, and these others are the best substitutes he can find.

I have an idea that to really reform something which I do not like I had better make reformers of all the young people. I wish that all the "successful" business men who have built our cities could have learned something of city planning when they went to high school. I presume that these men were at least high-school graduates. I wonder if they would have allowed the slums just to grow if they had been taught a reverence for the beautiful and for life. I wonder if the chief ornamentation of the downtown districts would be the dazzling electric signs, in which the lover of beauty may take pleasure only if he can blur their bright colors and blot out in his mind their commercial significance. My wish is that all of the coming "successful" business men might know that slums are a disgrace, and that, although beauty may not be truth, the need for beauty is a very real part of life.

Before I say any more, I must answer the objector who protests that boys and girls are now overcrowded with studies.

Those who have read in the July, 1916, *Atlantic* the article "Parents and Schools," by Dr. Abraham Flexner, will remember that he suggested that formal grammar, many of the higher arithmetical problems, Latin grammar, much of algebra and geometry—in fact, all subjects which have their force by dint of long existence alone—be eliminated. However, he substituted no studies to take the place of those discarded. Time too is unnecessarily taken by teachers of literature and rhetoric, history, and sciences who are apt to forget essentials in their joy over certain technicalities which seem to give a professional tinge to their work. The adolescent is ready for big ideas; he will have time for professionalism later.

To be seen but never to voice his wants is the rule we impose upon the adolescent. We do not consider that his strange, inchoate

yearnings to know all and to be all are worth trying to give expression to. Then we wonder why high-school boys and girls make so much noise and in so short a time fall into the dull ways of their elders. If puberty is the birthday of the imagination, as Dr. Hall says, I think that we can add that it is also the birthday of the soul. But we have been too busy to give that birthday fitting celebration. We have been more neglectful than certain barbarous peoples, who, crudely enough, have recognized the new needs of the adolescent; for they have sent the boy or girl at puberty to think alone of his new-born spirit, and to consider also the well-being of his tribe. Mr. Edward Earle Purinton has noted the result of failure to reveal to the child his own nature and his relationship to the world: "The average man—the 'successful' business man—is apt to be an emotional idiot and a spiritual lunatic."<sup>1</sup> And yet the adolescent does not willingly so become an idiot and a lunatic.

The classes of a certain English teacher were popular, because, said a high-school boy of my acquaintance quite frankly and naively, "I like her moral talks; they show she is thinking about things." A Sunday-school class of boys sixteen years of age, bored by Bible-study, awoke to enthusiastic attention when they heard a discussion comparing Germany's solution of the poverty evil with our own haphazard charitable efforts. The humanities, as I have chosen to call the laws of the human and of human affairs, have not been completely neglected, because the English and history teachers are very often big enough to see the relation of their subjects to world forces. Yet they cannot handle psychology, sociology, economics, city planning, and aesthetics exclusively or completely. That which is nobody's business is apt to remain so.

The teacher of the Far East, Rabindranath Tagore, has had to remind the West of the need for meditation and contemplation. Perhaps we might all feel called upon to meditate and contemplate disinterestedly and unselfishly the rights and wrongs of one another if, as young people, we had considered the laws and expressions of man's nature instead of having learned or tried to learn some of the categories of knowledge he has made.

<sup>1</sup> Edward Earle Purinton, "The Efficient Man in his Home and Community," *The Independent*, July 17, 1916.